

Fiscal Responsibility and Earmarks

June 18, 2007

Watch the speech

Mr. ALTMIRE. I did want to add some levity to the evening, because people watch late night television. We're here; it's after 11:00. And the gentleman perfectly set me up by talking about the President's radio address. So I wanted to read a quote from the President's radio address that, for those that know history and for those that don't, I'm going to remind them of some of the history. They're going to find this quote to be quite entertaining. And this is the President's radio address.

"In the weeks ahead, my administration will continue pushing for earmark reform and holding the line on Federal spending. The American people do not want a return to the days of tax and spend policies. They expect accountability and fiscal discipline in Washington, D.C."

Now, certainly, we don't disagree with that statement, but for those that understand the history of this administration, they can understand why some of us might be amused to hear the President saying such a thing, because I would remind my colleagues, if they need reminding, that prior to President Bush taking office, the 4 years immediately before his term, his first term, we had had 4 consecutive years of budget surplus, surpluses that were forecast as far as the eye can see.

In fact, the Congressional Budget Office scored the 10-year projection of surplus at over \$5 trillion of surplus.

So President Bush comes into office, there's every reason to expect these surpluses are going to continue.

Well, what have we seen in the 6-plus years that this President has been this office? Well, we've seen six consecutive budget deficits, deficits that before the Democrats retook control of Congress, were forecast as far as the eye can see. And this has been the biggest spending administration in over the past 6 years before this year, the biggest spending Congresses in the history of this country.

So for the President to get on the radio and come before audiences and lecture the Democrats on fiscal responsibility, and I would re-read that last statement on what he says the American people expect, ``They expect accountability and fiscal discipline in Washington, D.C."

Well, over the course of that 6 years, the President added \$3.5 trillion to the national debt. Now, keep in mind what I said earlier, that the projection before he took office was, over the 10-year period, we would have over \$5 trillion in surplus. But, instead, in just 6 years, he had an \$8 trillion turnaround, from \$5 trillion on the plus side to \$3 trillion on the deficit side.

And I would suggest, if you had said to an economist going into that term, figure out a way that this is possible, how can a President, using economic policy, working with the Republican-controlled Congress, have a \$8 trillion swing from surplus to deficit, most economists would have said, oh, that's impossible. You can't possibly mismanage the economy in such a way that you could have that poor of an outcome. Well, unfortunately, we have.

So here, again, to have this President lecture this Congress on fiscal responsibility is simply inconsistent with the facts.

He also references earmarks in the appropriations process. And we do have Ms. Wasserman Schultz here, a member of the Appropriations Committee. And I know she will have something to say about this as well.

But I wanted to remind my colleagues about the history of the 12 years that the Republicans were in control of this House, from 1995 through 2006. Well, for that 12-year period, the 12 budget cycles that we had, I don't know if any of my colleagues would like to venture a guess, how many times in those 12 years do you think the Republican Congress finished the appropriations process on time? How many times were all the appropriations bills completed by October 1, which, under statute, is the beginning of the fiscal year?

The gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Would it be none?

Mr. ALTMIRE. Zero. That is correct.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That would be none

Mr. ALTMIRE. Zero times in 12 years. Now, interestingly, you'd say, well, it must be difficult to do then. Maybe it's not often that we're able to do this. Does the gentlewoman from Florida wish to venture a guess on the last time that the budgets were all completed on time and the appropriations were completed by October 1 in their entirety?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Altmire, at the risk of being the little girl who shoots her hand up in the first row of the classroom, that would be the last time Democrats were in control right before the 1994 switch from majority to minority.

Mr. ALTMIRE. Right. In the 1994 year, the Democratic Congress, the last year the Democrats controlled Congress, the Democrats were able to complete all the budget bills, all the appropriations bills on time. The last time it has happened. Then we had 12 years of Republican rule in this Congress, in this House, and we had 12 consecutive years where the appropriations bills were not completed on time.

So it should be no surprise to any of my colleagues and other outside observers that the Republicans are not anxious to see the Democrats come back into power and right away pass all 12 appropriations bills in a timely fashion. So I was not surprised, and I suspect others were not surprised, to see the extraordinary delaying tactics that we saw take place in this House last week, with continual and repeated procedural motions, motions to rise.

And those of us that sat here at 2 o'clock in the morning on that night, we realized that this was not about substance. This was not about policy. This was merely about denying the Democrats a legislative victory because the last thing those on the other side would want is for us to come in and right away pass the appropriations bills on time, which hasn't happened since 12 years ago when we last controlled Congress.

And, lastly, the President mentions earmarks. His quote again: "In the weeks ahead, my administration will continue pushing for earmark reform."

Well, what has been the history of earmarks under the Republican Congress? Let's go back to that 12-year period, and I know the gentlewoman knows the answer; so I will spare you the question this time. In 1994, that last year that the Democrats controlled Congress, there were 4,000 earmarks, approximately, in all the spending bills combined for \$26 billion. That is what they represented. Now, that sounds like a lot and it is a lot. It is a lot of earmarks and it is a lot of money.

Well, let's compare that to last year, the last year the Republicans controlled Congress. These were the people, you recall, that last week were decrying the use of earmarks and talking about how unfair it was how the Democrats were approaching it, and we have a President now who says he is going to continue pushing for earmark reform, "continue" being the operative word there. Well, when you hear the word "continue," let's thing think about what happened last year. Now, recall in 1994, 4,000 earmarks, \$26 billion. Last year, 2006, 16,000 earmarks, unprecedented, the highest in the history of the country, \$64 billion of earmarks, compared to \$26 billion in 1994.

So here again, please spare us the lecture about fiscal responsibility and accountability in the appropriations process and certainly as it pertains to earmarks. We have had, over the past 6 years of this administration and over the past 12 years

of Republican leadership in this Congress, the biggest-spending Congress and administration in the history of the country. They spent more money, they ran up bigger deficits, they used more earmarks for more money than any Congress and any administration in the history of the country. So please forgive me if I view with skepticism some of the President's comments over the weekend.